

Zululand Related Articles

by Gavin D Peckham

Relating to John Dunn, Catherine Dunn, the Anglo-Zulu War sites of Fort Chelmsford and the Battle of Nyezane as well as the Raphia Palms at Mtunzini.



John Dunn - 1860

Catherine Dunn – Brief History and Gravesite

NOTE: This is the introductory section of my original article which was omitted from the copy published in the eGSA journal, Genesis, which is attached below.

ALSO: This gravesite is in a very “sensitive” area and may be exposed to risk of vandalism. For that reason, exact directions on how to find it are not given here.

The definitive work on the history and life of John Dunn, Zulu Chief, is the PhD thesis of Charles Ballard published in 1985 by AD Donker (Pty) LTD, ISBN 0 86852 006 3. If you do not have access to this book then a Web search will provide a selection of basic accounts. For example see:



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Robert_Dunn

<http://www.mtunzini.co.za/dunn.htm>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/1469474/Zulu-descendants-of-Scot-who-fathered-117-children-win-fight-with-squatters.html>

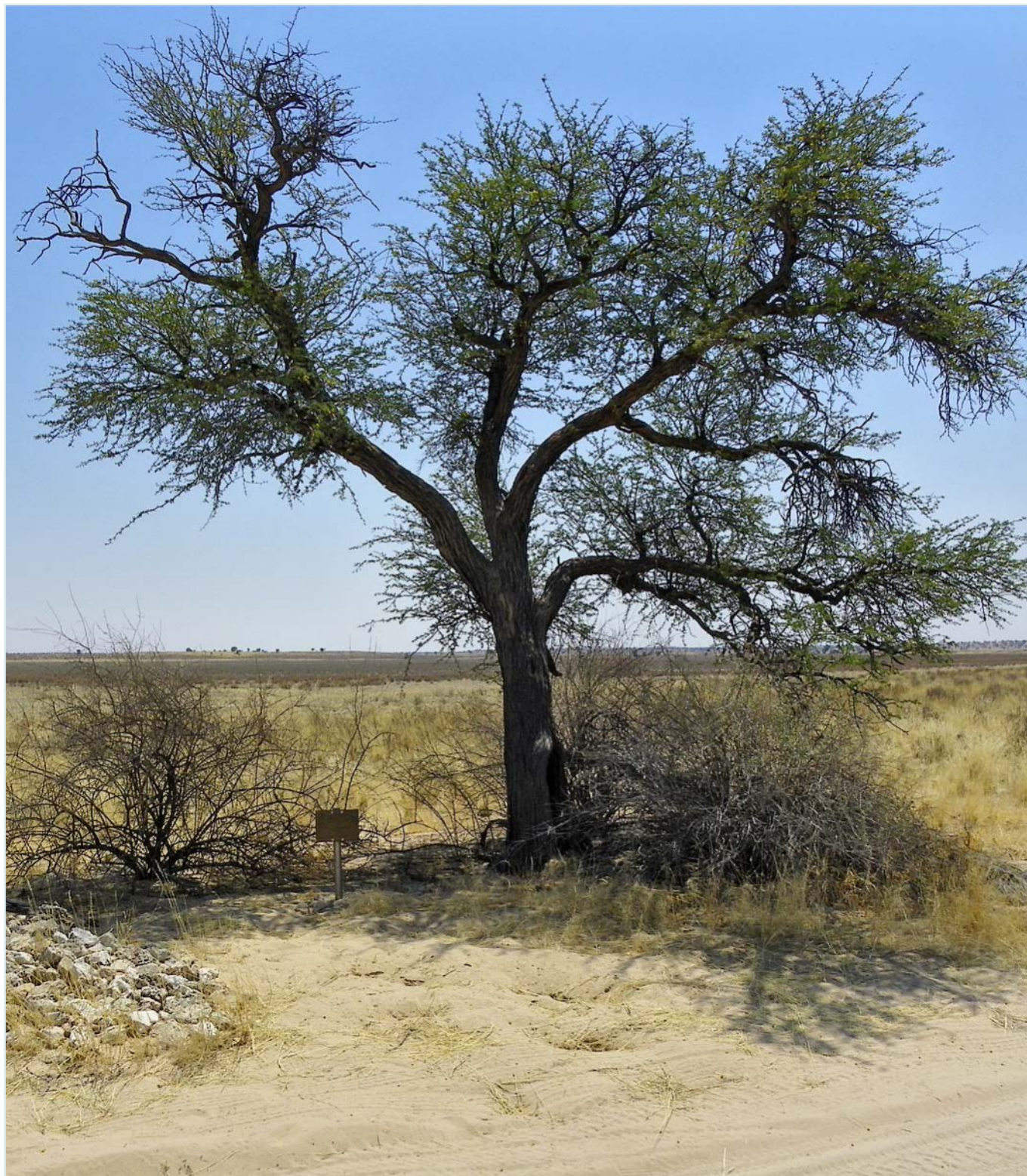
These on-line accounts contain various discrepancies and generally say very little about John Dunn's first wife, Catherine. Even Ballard's treatise does not have very much more to add but a summary of this is given below, along with details and photos of her grave site.

The remainder of this article was published in Genesis and is attached below.



genesis

Genealogy without frontiers *Genealogie sonder grense*



Loneliest grave on the planet?

Coordinates: -25 05.425, 20 25.438

see the article by Riana le Roux on page 7



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Cover Photo - Riana le Roux

Words, phrases and numbers in blue are links.
Woorde, frases en nommers in blou is skakels.



Catherine Dunn – Brief History and Gravesite

by Gavin Peckham
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The on-line accounts of the life of John Dunn (see below) contain various discrepancies and generally say very little about John Dunn's first wife, Catherine. Even Ballard's treatise does not have very much more to add but a summary is given below.

Catherine Pierce – A brief history

Catherine Dunn (nee Pierce) was born in the 1830s, (probably 1837 – see below) to a Cape Malay mother and a white father, Frank Pierce.

The Pierce family were in the employment of Robert Dunn, the father of John Dunn, and moved with the Dunn family from Port Elizabeth to Port Natal (Durban) in the 1830s. As with John Dunn, it is not certain whether Catherine was born in Port Elizabeth or in Port Natal.

John Dunn left Port Natal in 1852 and took the 15-year-old Catherine with him. A year later in 1853, when Catherine was 16 and John was about 19, they were married. Ballard (pg 223) fails to elaborate on how they became married whilst wandering around in Zululand.

The young couple lived a nomadic lifestyle in Zululand until 1854 when a retired British Army captain, Joshua Walmsley, who was then employed as a Border Agent by the Natal government, took them under his wing. They spent six years under Walmsley's patronage, furthering their education and employment prospects in the process.

During this period (late 1850s) Dunn began to branch out on his own and eventually became a highly regarded advisor to Cetshwayo, who gave him a large tract of land along the coast, north of the Thukela River. Here, in 1858, and based at

Mangeti, Dunn established himself with Catherine and the family prospered.

Dunn then began to marry a succession of local Zulu women and, despite Catherine's strong disapproval, he eventually married 48 of them. Catherine aspired to being as 'European' as possible. She condemned Dunn for his 'degenerate' behaviour and feared a loss of status as Dunn took additional wives. Dunn held her in high regard and elevated her status to that of 'Great Wife'. She was the only wife allowed into Dunn's presence without first announcing herself. Catherine lived in a comfortable, European-style home at Mangete with numerous African servants in attendance. Her feared loss of status never materialised. Catherine was racially prejudiced against blacks who she regarded as 'inferior'. Such prejudice was common at the time and sadly persists to this day.

Many of Dunn's marriages were necessitated by diplomacy, local politics, cultural demands and, presumably, other reasons. Catherine had little sympathy for Dunn's position as a Zulu chief, or understanding of the political importance attached to his accumulation of wives. Dunn's assorted marriages produced well in excess of 100 offspring. There is some controversy about the exact number of wives and offspring due to Dunn allegedly having several unofficial arrangements.

Catherine Dunn – Brief History and Gravesite (continued)

Catherine survived her husband by almost 10 years and, according to the inscription on her gravestone, she died on 27 January, 1905 at the age of 72 years (probably 68 – see below). Her grave is located not far north of the Thukela River next to a minor district road, between the R102 and the N2 highway.

The grave is currently neglected and obscured by vegetation. It is under threat of serious damage by the rapid growth of an adjacent fig tree. We hope to discreetly poison this small tree in the near future.

NOTE: This gravesite is in a very “sensitive” area and may be exposed to risk of vandalism. For that reason, exact directions on how to find it are not given here.

Until some years ago, the gravestone was topped by a substantial cross made of the same material as the rest of the grave. Despite a lengthy search in the surrounding vegetation during a visit in September, 2018, we were unable to locate this cross although the spot from which it was broken off was clearly visible. The inscription is made of metal lettering affixed to the gravestone and reads,

In
Loving Memory
of
CATHERINE
Relict of the Late JOHN DUNN
Who Died 27th January 1905
Aged 72 Years

The word *relict* is an old English word for *widow*.

It is interesting that she is buried near her home at Mangeti and not next to her husband at Emoyeni.



Gavin Peckham & Albert van Jaarsveld



Catherine Dunn’s Gravesite, under the fig tree
behind the telephone pole



Catherine Dunn’s Gravestone

Catherine Dunn – Brief History and Gravesite (continued)

Unresolved date discrepancies.

Catherine's gravestone states that she died on 27 January, 1905 at the age of 72 years. If this were correct, then it would make 1832 her most likely year of birth. However, this is two years before the birth of John Dunn in 1834, thus (apparently) making Catherine two years older than John. This was most certainly not the case. The simplest way to resolve the matter is to assume that the age stated on Catherine's gravestone is incorrect. If Catherine was actually 68 at the time of her death, then she would have been born in 1837, been 15 when Dunn left Port Natal in 1852 and 16 in 1853 when she was married –

in accordance with Ballard's information. It is hard to imagine how Catherine's family could have got her age so wrong but it seems to me that this is the most likely explanation. The astute reader will notice other minor discrepancies in the recorded dates. If the chap who produced a PhD on the topic cannot sort them out, then don't expect any solutions from me.

Please note that despite the age stated on this gravestone, I am almost certain that Catherine was only 68 years of age at the time of her death.
GP

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John Dunn – Zulu Chief – Grave Site

NOTE: To avoid trespassing charges by the land owners, please obtain permission at the farm house before proceeding further to visit this grave site. See details below.

The definitive work on the history and life of John Dunn is the PhD thesis of Charles Ballard published in 1985 by AD Donker (Pty) LTD, ISBN 0 86852 006 3. If you do not have access to this book then a Web search will provide a selection of accounts. These contain various minor discrepancies especially with respect to dates. For example:

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<http://www.mtunzini.co.za/dunn.htm>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/1469474/Zulu-descendants-of-Scot-who-fathered-117-children-win-fight-with-squatters.html>



Apart from archival material and his numerous descendants, the only remaining physical evidence of John Dunn, as far as I am aware, is his grave site (see below) and a side water off the lagoon in the Umlalazi Nature Reserve at Mtunzini where his assorted wives bathed. The shady tree at Mtunzini, under which he held his indabas (meetings) and the remains of his various residences, have long since vanished.

The intention of this article is simply to record the location and relevant details of John Dunn's grave site and not to provide an historical account of the man.

John Dunn was born in 1834, either in Port Elizabeth or in Port Natal. The exact day and place have not been definitely determined. He died on 5 August 1895 and is buried on his ancestral land at S 28° 59' 189" ; E 31° 38' 515' at 27m asl.

To find his grave site, get yourself onto the R102 and head about 8 km north of Gingindlovu, or about 12 km south of Mtunzini and look for the sign board to "Emoyeni" – on the seaward side. Turn onto this (currently) tarred road. At the fork, keep right and follow the tar road down until you cross the small Nyezane River. Continue up the gradual rise and then, just before the horizon, turn right onto a dirt road with a sign that (currently) reads "Beaumont Estates".

Drive along this road for a km or so until you spot a dirt road leading off to a farm house about 100 m away on the right. Drive up to the security fence surrounding this house and then STOP AND ANNOUNCE YOUR PRESENCE! You are now on private property. Ask permission to proceed further to the gravesite. If you adhere to this basic courtesy there will be no problems. If you ignore this fundamental decency, you may find yourself CHARGED WITH TRESPASSING.

After receiving permission, turn right at the farmhouse gates, proceed about 50 m, turn left and proceed for about 100 m then take the track to the left. In about 100 m you will be at the gravesite.

See photos below.

Gavin Peckham & Albert van Jaarsveld

September 2018.

John Dunn ~ 1860s.



John Dunn ~ 1880s



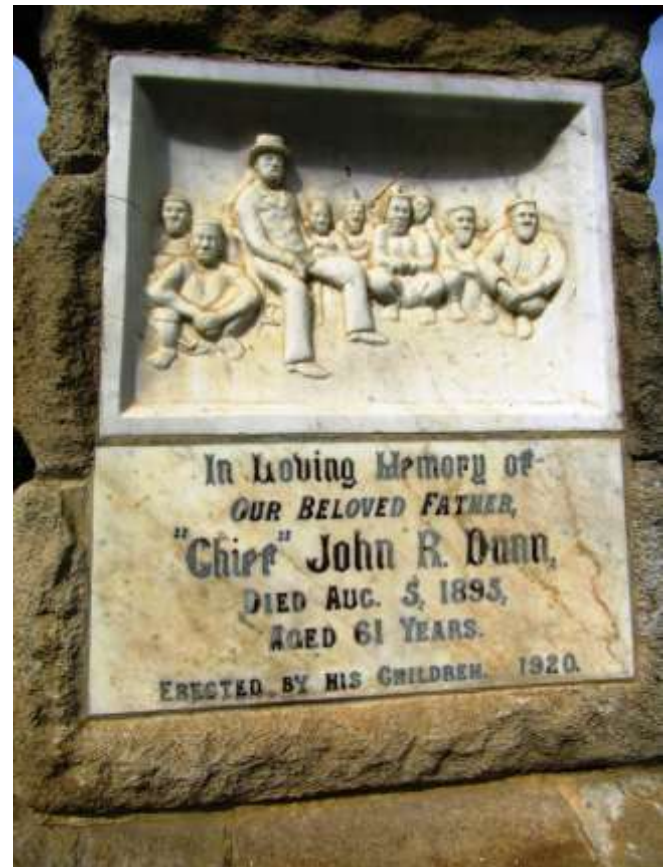
JD in consultation at
Mtunzini



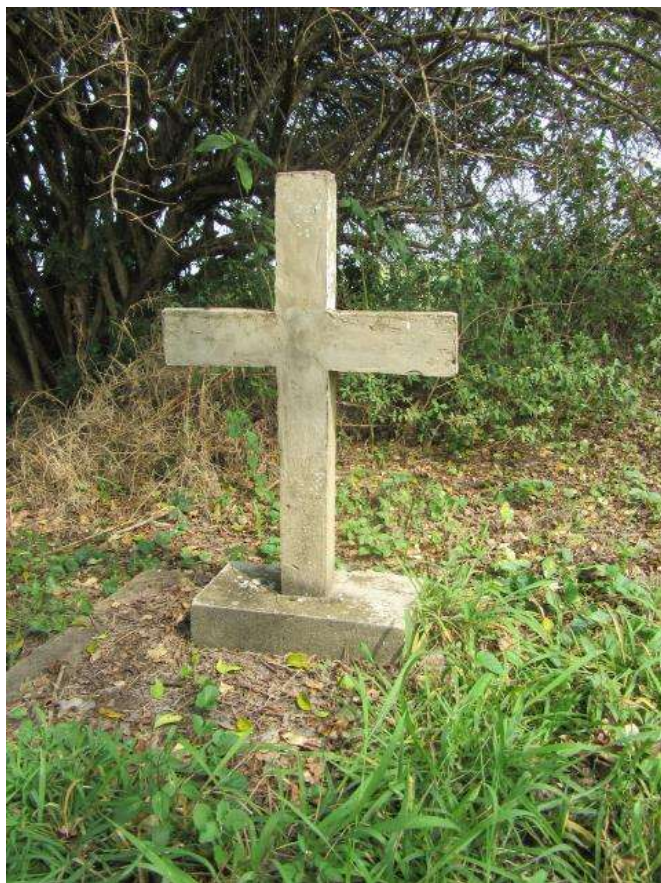
First, a general view of the grave site.



John Dunn's memorial is the large edifice on the right and his original grave is in front of it. In the centre is the grave of Ned and Nellie Dunn and on the right is a cross on the grave of an unknown Dunn family member. More detailed photos of these follow.



A grave marked by a cross with no inscription– presumably one of the Dunn family



John Dunn's original grave stone, adjacent to his memorial stone.



Fort Chelmsford Memorial Site

Gavin D Peckham – September 2018



This “fort”, like many others established during the 1879 Anglo-Zulu war was simply a tented camp surrounded by a ditch with the earth from the excavation heaped up on the inside to form a “ditch and wall” fortification around the camp. This fort was set up to secure the ford crossing the Nyezane River.

The location of the fort is on a farm, established much later, and named Fort Chelmsford after the earlier fort established at this site. The fort itself was located just in front of the current farm house, overlooking the ford crossing the Nyezane River. All signs of the fort have vanished but a slight embankment in the gardens may have been a part of the original fort. This farm is located on the R102, about half way between Gingindlovu and Mtunzini.

A graveyard for troops that died whilst serving here is nearby (details below) on the opposite side of the R102 from the farm house. None of the troops stationed at Fort Chelmsford died in battle. Most died of dysentery, snake bites, etc. No sign of any individual graves is currently visible. Instead, there is a single, relatively recent memorial monument with an inscription to a broader spectrum of troops than those stationed at Fort Chelmsford. It reads, “IN MEMORY OF THE 3 OFFICERS AND 68 MEN WHO DIED WHILST SERVING WITH THE FIRST DIVISION UNDER MAJOR GEN CREALOCK IN 1879 DURING THE ZULU WAR MANY OF WHOM ARE BURIED HERE.”

The memorial monument is about 50 m off the left-hand side of the road as you drive north from Gingindlovu on the R102. The monument is located at GPS Co-ords: 28° 59” 16’ S and 31° 37” 47’ E. The monument is currently surrounded by sugarcane fields and separated from the cane by an encircling boundary of assorted trees.

The current farm manager, Peter Young, has assumed responsibility for keeping the site in good condition. Many thanks Peter – much appreciated.

The photos below were taken when we visited the site in September, 2018.



IN MEMORY OF THE 3
OFFICERS AND 68 MEN WHO
DIED WHILE SERVING
WITH THE FIRST
DIVISION UNDER
MAJOR GEN CREALOCK
IN 1879 DURING THE
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Battle of the Nyezane River

An Anglo-Zulu War Memorial Site

Gavin Peckham – September 2018



The battle at the Nyezane was fought on the same day as the battle of Isandlwana – 22 January, 1879. The British and colonial forces won the day at the minor Nyezane skirmish but suffered a massive defeat at Isandlwana.

The colonial troops who were killed at the battle of Nyezane are buried on a site marked by only a memorial with a list of their names. No individual graves are currently visible.

The site is located not far from the left hand side of the R66 as you head north from Gingindlovu to Eshowe, just as you start to climb the first major hill – about 4 km beyond Gingindlovu, as measured from the turnoff to Mtunzini. There was a sign board marking the historical site of the battle of Nyezane, however, this has now vanished, so you need to watch carefully to select the correct minor turn off onto a dirt road to the left. The turn off is located at 28° 59' 59" S ; 31° 32' 33" E. Follow this winding road for a couple of hundred meters, then take the road up the slope to the right for about 50 m and the site will be clearly visible at 28° 56' 59" S ; 31° 22' 24" E.

Currently there is a fence with a gate, surrounding the 9 m by 12 m site which is neat, tidy and well maintained – although I do not know who can take the credit for doing this.

The first photo (1) is a general view of the site. The flat (horizontal) memorial stone on the left of this photo is a memorial to the Zulu troops who fell. The inscription is shown in photo 2. In the centre is an information board. Inscriptions are shown in photos 3 and 4. Finally, there is the memorial to the British and colonial troops that fell. These are shown in photos 5, 6 and 7.

The memorial stone to the fallen Zulu warriors (Photo 2) starts with a tribute in isiZulu. The English version is inscribed below and reads:

“BATTLE OF NYEZANE, 22/01/1879. IZINGULUBE, IQHWA, UMXHAPHO, IZINGWEGWE, INSUKAMGENI. THE NAMES OF MOST OF THE BRAVE DEFENDERS OF THE OLD ZULU, ORDER WHO DIED DURING THIS BATTLE ARE LOST TO HISTORY. SOME 300 WARRIORS, REPRESENTING THE REGIMENTS ABOVE, AND UNDER THE COMMAND OF MATHIYA, PERISHED HERE.”

The inscription on the information board has an English version on the left and an isiZulu version on the right – photos 3 and 4. The English version reads:

“BATTLE OF NYEZANE. The first attack on the British in the Anglo Zulu war occurred on 22 January 1879 while about 3 000 British soldiers of the Coastal Column under Colonel Charles Pearson were taking a breakfast break, before beginning the climb from the coastal plain towards the higher ground of Eshowe. The British called it the Battle of the Nyezane after the nearby river which they had just crossed. Zulus know it as the Battle of Wombane after the mountain which was key to their surprise attack on the British. Twelve British soldiers, including two officers, were killed in the battle and buried on the battlefield close to the memorial which now marks the site of the battle. Between 400 and 500 Zulu warriors were killed in the battle. After the battle the British soldiers made their way to Eshowe and turned the abandoned mission station into a makeshift fort. The disastrous defeat of the British at the battle of Isandlwana was fought on the same day several 100 kilometres to the northwest.”

The memorial to the British troops (photos 5, 6 and 7) reads:

“IN MEMORY OF THE FOLLOWING OFFICERS AND MEN KILLED ON 22ND JANUARY 1879 AT THE BATTLE OF NYEZANE (OMBANE) & WHO ARE BURIED HERE.

LIEUT. J.L. RAINES	N.N.C.
LIEUT. GUSTAV PLATTNER	“ “ “
SERGT. EMIL UNGER	“ “ “
CPL. CARL GOESCH	“ “ “
CPL. WILHELM LIEPER	“ “ “
CPL. EDWARD MILLER	“ “ “
PTE. JOHN BOUGH	3RD REG (BUFFS)
PTE. JAMES KELLERKER	“ “ “
FIVE PRIVATES OF THE NATAL NATIVE CORPS”	

Re: N.N.C. From Wikipedia we have, “The **Natal Native Contingent** was a large force of auxiliary soldiers in British South Africa, forming a substantial portion of the defence forces of the British colony of Natal, and saw action during the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War. Recruited from the local black population, the NNC was originally created in 1878 in order to bolster the defences of Natal. Most NNC troops were drawn from the Basuto and Mponso tribes, which had had long experience of fighting against the Zulus.”

Photo 1. A general view of the site.



Photo 2. The memorial to the Zulu troops.



Photo 3. The information board.



P. T. O.

Photo 4. The English section of the information board.



uMlalazi
Local Municipality



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Photo 5. The memorial to the British troops and allies who fell.



Photo 6. Inscription on the memorial to the British troops and allies who fell. (Top bit)

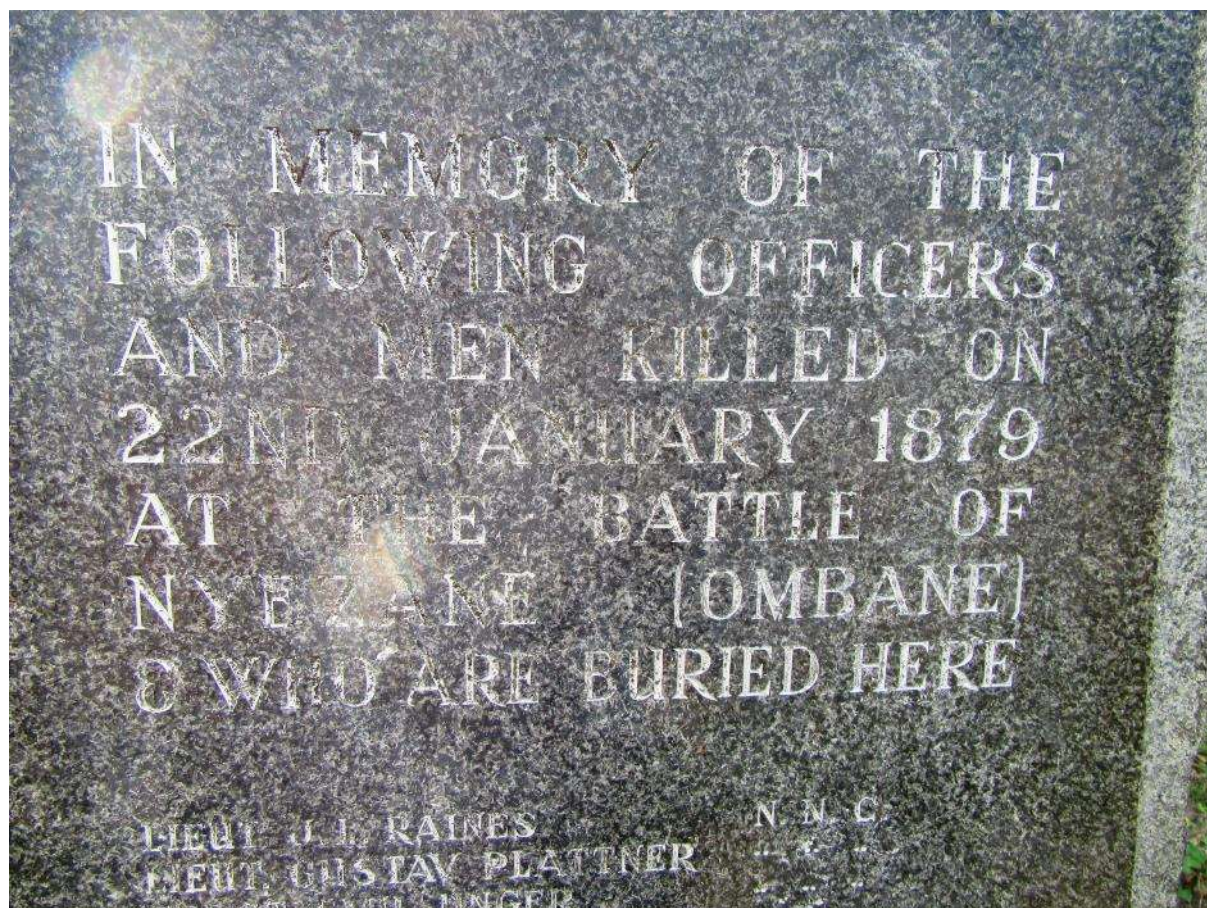
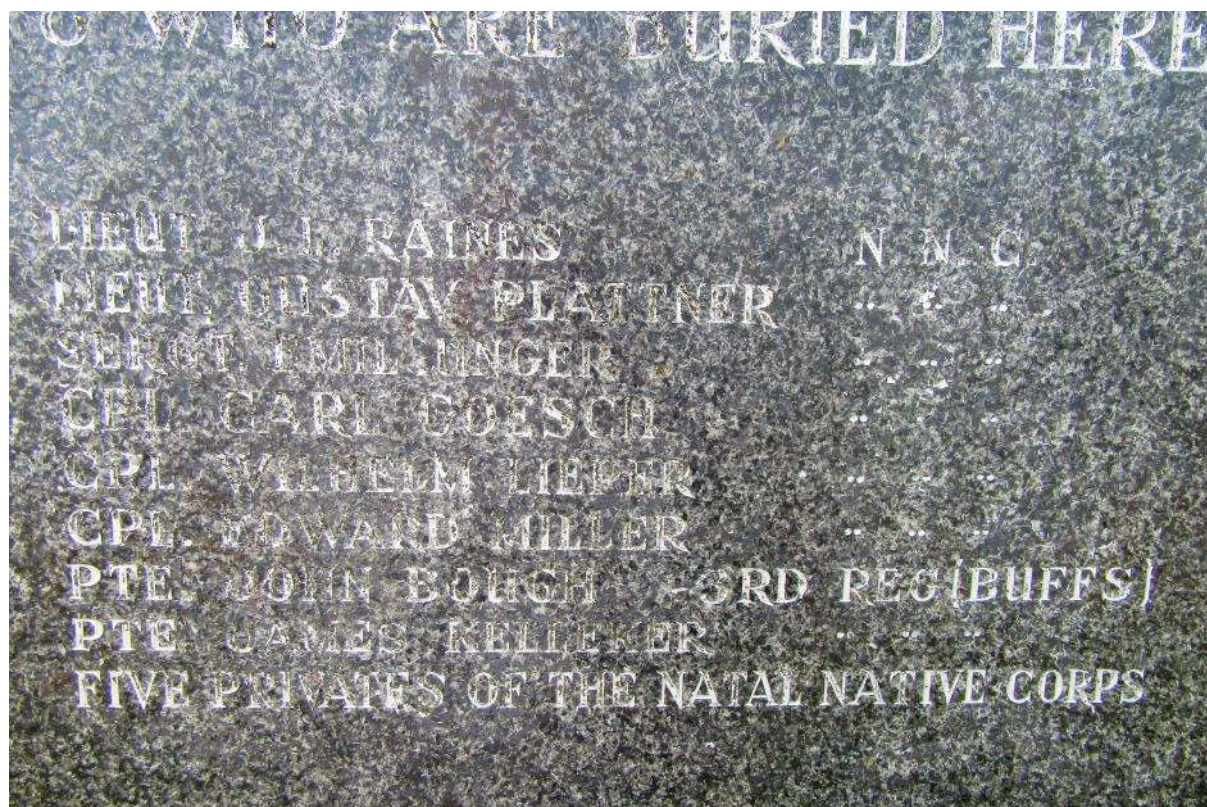


Photo 7. Inscription on the memorial to the British troops and allies who fell. (Cont.)



New historical perspectives on the *Raphia* Palm Monument at Mtunzini

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The *raphia* palms now growing at Mtunzini on the Zululand coast do not occur there naturally and current opinions regarding the origin of these palms are inaccurate. The palms were in fact established in 1916 from seed sent to the Mtunzini magistrate by the Director of Prisons in Pretoria, the object being to establish a local supply of fibre for the prison's broom-making industry. Commercial interest in the palms ended when it was found that the fibre from these palms was unsuited to that purpose. Nevertheless, the palms continued to flourish and in 1942, after a rather inadequate investigation, they were proclaimed a national monument, an action which is being reconsidered at present.

Die raffiapalms wat te Mtunzini aan die kus van Zoeloland voorkom, is nie inheems aan Mtunzini nie en teenswoordige menings aangaande hul oorsprong is onakkuraat. Die oorspronklike palmsaad is in 1916 deur die Direkteur van Gevangenis, Pretoria, aan die landdros te Mtunzini gestuur met die doel om 'n plaaslike bron van raffia-vesel vir die gevangenis se besemvervaardigingsnywerheid daar te stel. Kommersiële belangstelling in die palms is beëindig toe dit aan die lig gekom het dat die vesel ongeskik is vir die bogenoemde doel. Die palms het nietemin floreer en na 'n ietwat onvoldoende ondersoek is die palms in 1942 tot nasionale monument verklaar, 'n handeling wat vandag met reg bevraagteken word.

Introduction

The *raphia* palms growing at Mtunzini on the Zululand coast were declared a national monument in 1942 and have at different times been the centre of commercial, botanical and historical interest. Considerable misinformation has been disseminated about these palms and many interesting facts concerning them have remained obscure. This article seeks to redress the situation.

The botanical background

The palms now growing at Mtunzini are one of 15 species belonging to the genus *Raphia*, all but one of which occur in the tropical and subtropical areas of Africa. Only one species of this genus is indigenous to the Republic of South Africa where its natural distribution is limited to a small area around Kosi Bay in the extreme north east of Zululand. Although the existence of these palms was already known to botanists at the turn of the century, they were believed, until recently, to belong to the species *Raphia vinifera*. It was only as recently as 1969 that they were identified as a new species which was named *R. australis*.¹

R. australis has the distinction of carrying the longest leaves in the plant kingdom and whilst the tree may grow to a height of about 25 m, more than half of this may be attributed to the length of the vast arching leaves which may reach as high as 18 m. The palms are fast-growing but have a relatively short life span, averaging 20 to 30 years. They are monocarpic and die after producing a single batch of eight to ten thousand fruits on an enormous inflorescence which develops in the crown of the leaves.^{2,3} These fruits form part of the diet of the palm nut vulture, *Gypohierax angolensis*. This large raptor is rare in South Africa and its distribution is closely associated with that of the *R. australis*⁴ (Figures 1, 2, 3).

Establishment of the *raphia* palms at Mtunzini

Early this century a grove of *raphia* palms was established at Mtunzini, which is better known to historians as the administrative and judicial headquarters of John Dunn, a white hunter/trader who served as a chieftain



Figure 1 A young *R. australis* aged about five years.

Photo: F.A. van Jaarsveld.



Figure 2 Mature *R. australis* aged about 15 to 20 years.

Photo: F.A. van Jaarsveld.

under the Zulu King Cetshwayo and who exercised a considerable amount of political control in the area for almost half a century.⁵

Much has been written about the establishment of raphias at Mtunzini but little of this information which appears to be based on local folk lore is accurate.⁶ A typical account⁷ is that of Errol Harrison, a palm enthusiast resident in Zululand, who writes:

'The grove at Mtunzini was started by Mr C.C. Foxon who was the local magistrate at that time. Mr Foxon was a very keen game hunter. He often went on hunting expeditions and on one of these expeditions he went to Kosi Bay. It was while he was hunting there that he came across extensive groves of *Raphia* palms growing along the shores of Lake Amanzimnyana ... He collected seed and planted these in the swamps near the (Mtunzini railway) station.'

The authors of authoritative botanical⁸ and historical⁹ texts give accounts similar to that of Harrison and further support for this narrative was obtained from C.C. Foxon (jnr.)¹⁰ whom the authors were privileged to interview shortly before his death in 1987. According to Foxon his father collected the seeds at Kosi Bay during a hunting trip in 1907. Foxon, who was born in 1916, could give no specific reasons for his father's decision to plant the palms at Mtunzini but was quite emphatic that these events took place in 1907.

Despite the claim of C.C. Foxon (jnr.), several other dates have been reported. A local official, L.E. Davis, claimed¹¹ that the raphias had already been growing for about five years when he arrived at Mtunzini in 1918, thus setting the date of establishment at about 1913. In contrast to these estimates, Harrison¹² and a Natal Parks, Game and Preservation Board ranger, W.M. Austen,¹³ both claim that the raphias were established at Mtunzini in 1915. Although there is a lack of unanimity



Figure 3 *R. australis* which have set seed, aged about 20 to 25 years. Notice the enormous inflorescences which project from the crown of each tree.

Photo: F.A. van Jaarsveld.

regarding the date, each of the above (refs. 6 to 13) concur in giving credit to C.C. Foxon (snr.), magistrate at Mtunzini from 1905 to 1921, for bringing the original seed to Mtunzini from the Kosi Bay area. However, neither the contention regarding the role played by Foxon (snr.), nor the alleged dates of establishment are correct.

The basic facts surrounding the origin of the raphia palms at Mtunzini are clearly spelled out in a letter¹⁴ sent from the Secretary for Justice and Director of Prisons, Jacob de Villiers Roos, to the magistrate at Mtunzini, C.C. Foxon (snr.), on 21 July 1916. The letter reads as follows:

'In the Prison brush and broommaking industry large quantities of bass fibre are used. This fibre is derived from the palm with the above name which flourishes in Portuguese Territory and to some extent also in Ingwavuma. At present this fibre is imported from West Africa via London at a very high cost. It would therefore effect a great saving if we could acclimatise the palm in the Union. It is understood that there is marshy Government ground in the neighbourhood of your Magistracy. The Minister would be glad if you would experiment in planting the seeds which go with this letter in the ground in question, using prison labour for the purpose. I shall be glad if you will take up the matter at once and report the progress from time to time.'

This directive from Roos to Foxon clearly fixes the date and the reason for the establishment of raphia palms at Mtunzini, but makes no reference to the origin of the seed supplied by Roos. However, on 19 July 1916 A.M. Bottomley of the Division of Botany in Pretoria, had sent Roos a parcel of raphia seeds obtained from Zululand.¹⁵ It seems likely but not certain that this was the seed which was forwarded to Foxon by Roos, two days later. Two further parcels of raphia seed were sent to Foxon on behalf of the Director of Prisons, Pretoria. The covering letter for the second batch¹⁶ gives no indication whatever of the source of the seed, but the covering letter for the third (and apparently final) batch¹⁷ states that the seed had been received from Portuguese East Africa. Even in this case it is not clear whether the seeds were grown in Portuguese East Africa or were imported via that country along with raphia fibre from West Africa. The lack of clear evidence regarding the origin of the seeds casts some doubt on the exact species planted at Mtunzini. This becomes a botanical rather than historical issue and the matter has been dealt with elsewhere.¹⁸

It is worth mentioning that Mtunzini was only one of several places at which it was suggested that raphias could be established for the purpose of providing a local supply of raphia fibre. The Experimental Farm at Winklespruit on the Natal south coast was suggested,¹⁹ whilst a small number of seeds were sent to both Umhlatuzi and to Empangeni, but the seeds failed to germinate and nothing further came of these ventures.²⁰ However, the Chief Native Commissioner for Natal,

C.A. Wheelwright, responding to a query from Roos, suggested that both Mtunzini and the Amanzimtoti Mission Reserve south of Durban would be appropriate sites for experimentation with the planting of raphia palms.²¹ Wheelwright pointed out that the existence of suitable swampy ground adjacent to a railway line and the availability of prison labour would make Mtunzini an ideal location to establish the raphias.

Roos responded promptly to these suggestions and forthwith sent seed to the magistrate at Mtunzini as indicated above. At the same time batches of seed were also sent to Wheelwright^{22,23} who was directed to pass them on to the Amanzimtoti Mission. In addition to these seeds Wheelwright also had two dozen young palms sent to the Mission^{24,25} by E.W. Baxter, then the Magistrate at Ingwavuma, which incorporates the Kosi Bay region. The palms at the Amanzimtoti Mission were placed under the care of the American missionary Rev. F.R. Bunker.²⁶ We have been unable to locate any further information regarding their fate and a recent *in situ* search produced no evidence for their survival.

The progress of the raphia palms at Mtunzini

In contrast to the uncertain fate of the raphias at the Amanzimtoti Mission, the progress of those at Mtunzini is well documented. On 3 August 1916 Foxon reported to Roos that the first batch of seeds had been planted.²⁷ Foxon's subsequent reports^{28,29} expressed concern at the fact that the seeds had not germinated, but by 12 February 1917, he was able to report that the first two seeds had sprouted,³⁰ and by 3 January 1918 a total of 14 plants were growing.³¹ It is clear from this correspondence that there is no sound basis for the various claims that Foxon (snr.) had already established raphia palms at Mtunzini under his own aegis prior to 1916. Had this been the case he would most certainly have mentioned the fact in his correspondence with Roos. Instead, he claims³² only that 'I was the first to report on this palm when (I was) Magistrate of the Maputa Division (which incorporated Kosi Bay).'

Within a year of the first seeds being planted at Mtunzini, Wheelwright had a sample of raphia leaves sent from the Kosi Bay area to the Director of Prisons in Pretoria.³³ These leaves were examined at the Pretoria Central Prison and it was found that the fibre was too short to be of use in brush-making.³⁴ This verdict appears to have put paid to the original motivation for the establishment of the raphias at Mtunzini and interest in the palms seems to have shifted from the Department of Prisons to the Department of Forestry. Therefore, by 1925, forester T.S. Bertram was able to submit a detailed report³⁵ to District Forest Officer R.C. Kotze in which he noted, *inter alia*, that 46 of the seeds were now growing.

The palms continued to flourish and in 1942 were proclaimed a national monument — a matter which is dealt with in greater detail below. By 1944, in reply to a query from the secretary of the Historical Monuments Commission, the magistrate at Mtunzini reported³⁶ that the palms had begun to set seed towards the end of 1943

and would soon all be dead. He reported further that steps had been taken to plant seeds throughout the district. The distribution of these seeds in the immediate vicinity of Mtunzini was facilitated by L.E. Davis, a local official employed in malaria control. Davis collected seeds from the original grove and planted them whilst visiting the surrounding swamplands in the course of his duties.^{37,38,39} In 1948 the grove at the original site was virtually destroyed by fire when a spark from a passing locomotive set the trees ablaze.⁴⁰ Fortunately they were able to regenerate and a fine grove of palms may be seen at the site today.

Over the last three decades Ian Garland, a well-known local conservationist, has made a substantial contribution to the raphia population by planting and distributing almost a thousand *R. australis* on and around his farm, 'Twin Streams', which borders Mtunzini.⁴¹ In recent years the local Town Board has played an active role in promoting the raphia palm, which along with the closely associated palm nut vulture, has been incorporated into the official town emblem⁴² (Figure 4). In 1986 a



Figure 4 The official town emblem of Mtunzini, which incorporates stylized representations of the palm nut vulture and of *R. australis*. Photo: F.A. van Jaarsveld.

boardwalk was constructed over the swamp at the site of the original grove to facilitate viewing of the palms by interested persons (Figure 5). The Town Board has propagated the trees widely on municipal land and has made the trees available free of charge to local residents for their gardens. As a result of these efforts, the palms currently enjoy a secure status.

Proclamation as a national monument

The proclamation of the raphias at Mtunzini as a national monument came about almost by chance. A well-known collector of Africana from Durban, Miss Killie Campbell, wrote to the Secretary of the Historical Monuments Commission.⁴³ This letter, dated 6 June 1942, instigated a process which eventually led to the proclamation and reads as follows:

'Raffia Palms: Mtunzini

Dear Sir,

Mrs W.K. Robertson, one of the leading lights of the Horticultural Society here, writes that about 600 to 700 yards the other side of Mtunzini is a clump of Raffia palms which is supposed to be "one of the Botanical wonders of Natal and Zululand" — and "that it is stated to be well worth preserving".

Miss Campbell continued,

'It is because it is so freely used by the natives there is a doubt whether it is still standing in its original form. Two men have approached Mrs Robertson and he (sic) promised to get in touch with me. Would it be possible to ask the Magistrate at Mtunzini, Zululand, to give us information about this clump of palms. Many of us are getting distressed to see the wanton destruction of some of our fine bush trees. I feel if we only make one example of preserving some outstanding tree or trees — it would show that we are alive to the fact that these trees (or flora) should be save for the coming generation.'

This well-intentioned letter is both vague and inaccurate in that the palms at Mtunzini were at no stage 'freely



Figure 5 The boardwalk which runs through the Raphia Monument at Mtunzini. Photo: F.A. van Jaarsveld.

used by the natives' and, furthermore, a good many outstanding trees had already been declared national monuments. For example the famous 'Post Office Tree' at Mossel Bay, proclaimed in 1938,⁴⁴ is of far greater historical interest than Mtunzini's raphias and the Mkambati Palms at Lusikisiki, proclaimed in 1936,⁴⁵ are of far greater botanical interest.

In response to Miss Campbell's letter, the Secretary of the Commission wrote to the Magistrate at Mtunzini asking for a report on the palms.⁴⁶ The magistrate in turn obtained a report from a local official, L.E. Davis, who expressed an unmotivated opinion that the palms should be proclaimed a monument in terms of the relevant act.⁴⁷ This opinion was passed on to the Commission and on 21 December 1942 the original grove of raphias was proclaimed a national monument⁴⁸ (Figure 6). One may mention in passing that the proclamation incorrectly indicated that the raphias were located in the Cape Province. A considerable amount of correspondence was required before this minor technical error could be corrected. A valid proclamation finally appeared in 1943, and so it was that Mtunzini's raphia palms joined a select group of about 17 other botanical specimens which form about 5% of the country's national monuments.⁴⁹ Bearing in mind the fact that the palms were proclaimed in terms of the Natural and Historical Monuments Relics and Antiquities Act of 1934, one may question the desirability of this proclamation since the palms are neither relics nor antiques and are of no great significance from either a natural or a historical point of view.

Since this time the legislation pertaining to national monuments has been changed⁵⁰ and under current statutes there is virtually no possibility that the palms would qualify as a national monument.⁵¹ On the basis of these observations the authors have recommended⁵² to the National Monuments Council that the raphia palms at Mtunzini be deproclaimed as a national monument, and have suggested that proclamation of the area as a nature reserve may be more appropriate. Be that as it

may, these impressive trees will continue to attract the attention and admiration of all those privileged to view them.

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Figure 6 The grove of *R. australis*, adjacent to the railway-line at Mtunzini, which currently enjoys the status of a historical monument. Photo: F.A. van Jaarsveld.

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Africa this species is found in the south-eastern Transvaal, Natal and south-western Cape Province (Figure 6). It occurs in damp places, often growing in water, and on stream and river banks and on the edge of dams.

The disjunct distribution may be attributed to the fact that seeds could have been transported to the main harbours of southern Africa, and spread from there. It flowers from December to April.

Voucher specimens: *Codd 6944* (PRE); *Esterhuysen 20155* (BOL); *Germishuizen 1640, 1858* (PRE); *Ward 5830* (NU, PRE).

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ARECACEAE

NEW BOTANICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORIGIN OF THE *RAPHIA* PALMS AT MTUNZINI

The natural distribution of raphia palms in South Africa is limited to the Kosi Bay area in the extreme north-east of Zululand. However, early this century a grove of raphia palms was established at Mtunzini about 250 km further south on the Zululand coast (Figure 7).

There has been much speculation as to exactly when, why and how the first raphia palms were introduced to Mtunzini. Secondary sources, past and present, verbal and non-verbal, (Austen 1953; C.C. Foxon Jr pers. comm. 1987; Harrison 1986; Oberholster 1972; Palmer & Pitman 1972) differ somewhat with respect to the 'when' and 'why'.

The original supply of seed was in fact sent from Pretoria to Mtunzini by the then Secretary for Justice and Director of Prisons, Jacob de Villiers Roos (1916), who wrote to the magistrate at Mtunzini on the 21st July 1916, that it would be economical to grow the raphia palm in the marshy Government ground there, to supply the fibre for the Prison brush and broommaking industry, instead of importing it from West Africa via London.

This directive from Roos to C.C. Foxon, who was magistrate at Mtunzini from 1905 to 1921, clearly fixes the date and the reason for the establishment of raphia palms at Mtunzini. The origin of the seed supplied by Roos is not stated. However, on the 19th July 1916, A.M. Bottomley (1916) of the Division of Botany in Pretoria, wrote to Roos stating, 'I am forwarding you herewith the seed of *Rafia* (sic) *vinifera* which we obtained from Zululand'. It seems likely but not certain, that this was the seed, which, two days later, was forwarded to Foxon by Roos.

Two further parcels of raphia seed were sent to Foxon on behalf of the Director of Prisons, Pretoria, for planting.

The covering letter (Director of Prisons 1917a) for the second batch, dated 10th January 1917, gives no indication whatever of the source of the seed.

It may also have been Zululand or perhaps Portuguese East Africa, but it is not unreasonable to consider the possibility that the seeds may even have come from West Africa, since raphia produce was imported from that source on a regular basis.

However, the covering letter (Director of Prisons 1917b) for the third (and apparently final) batch, dated 20th January 1917 states, 'I am forwarding under separate cover a consignment of the abovementioned seed (*R. vinifera*) which has been received from Portuguese East Africa'. This batch may have been *R. australis*, a species described only in 1969 (see discussion below) or *R. vinifera*, both of which occur in what is today Mozambique.

It is clear that in no single instance can the identity of the original batches of seed be established beyond reasonable doubt. Obviously, at least one batch must have contained *R. australis* in order to account for the existence of the present population at Mtunzini. At the time it was believed that all these seeds were of the species *R. vinifera*, but this was to be disproved later, as we shall see.

The raphia palms indigenous to northern Zululand and southern Mozambique are geographically isolated from other giant raphia palms in Africa. Despite this they were originally presumed to be of the species *R. vinifera* which occurs commonly in West Africa. An indication to the contrary was recorded when specific differences between the fruits of the Kosi Bay palms and those of *R. vinifera*, were noted by Aitken & Gale (1921), who concluded that 'either



FIGURE 7.—*Raphia* palms at Mtunzini, Zululand coast.

this palm is a variety of *R. vinifera*, or it may be a new species of the genus'. King (1925) also referred specifically to 'the true Raffia Palm', *R. vinifera*, and 'the giant palms from Kosi Bay', clearly believing them to be different species.

Much later, 1967, two palms at the Botanic Station in Durban, which were grown from seed collected at Mtunzini by Dr V.A. Wager, developed large (± 3 m), erect inflorescences growing centrally above the crown of the leaves. It was then realized that a previously undescribed species was involved since, amongst others, the inflorescence of *R. vinifera* is pendulous. Obermeyer & Strey (1969) described the new species and named it *R. australis*. Despite the inclusion of 'Historical Notes' in their paper, Obermeyer & Strey make no reference to the observations of Aitken & Gale and King, whose earlier reports appear to have been overlooked.

The very uncertain identity of the original seed and the proven ease with which the true identity of established raphias may be overlooked, suggest the strong possibility that one or even more raphia species other than *R. australis* were also introduced to Mtunzini. Further support for this possibility is contained in a letter addressed to the Conservator of Forests, Pietermaritzburg, by King (1925), who stated that, 'The seeds supplied by Mr de V. Roos were of the true Raffia Palm. In addition to these certain seed of the giant palms from Kosi Bay was planted'. Yet today only *R. australis* is known to grow in the Mtunzini area. It could be speculated that the exotic species died out because they were less well adapted to local conditions.

The increase of *Raphia* trees in the immediate vicinity of Mtunzini was facilitated in the 1940's by L.E. Davis who collected seeds from the original grove and planted them while visiting the surrounding swamplands in the course of his duties as malaria control officer (Palgrave 1977; Wicht 1969).

In 1942 the original grove was declared a national monument (Government Gazette 1942). The grove is of no great historic significance and the procedures which led to the declaration were somewhat unorthodox. In spite of this, Mtunzini's raphia palms joined about 17 other botanical specimens which form about 5% of the list of the country's official national monuments (Oberholster 1972). The grove at the original site was virtually destroyed in 1948 when a spark from a passing locomotive set the trees ablaze (Oberholster 1972). The remaining trees were able to regenerate and a fine grove of palms may be seen at the site today.

Over the last three decades Mr Ian Garland has made a substantial contribution to the population of raphia palms by planting and distributing almost a thousand *R. australis* on, and in the vicinity of his farm 'Twin Streams', which borders Mtunzini (I.F. Garland pers. comm. 1987).

In recent years the Mtunzini Town Board has played an active role in promoting the raphia palm (Figure 7), which along with the closely associated palm nut vulture, *Gypohierax angolensis*, has been incorporated into the official town emblem (Government Gazette 1981).

Even though it is doubtful whether the exact origin of Mtunzini's raphia palms will ever be known their present status is secure and improving.

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